

TS #141896-a
Cy. 6

8 February 1959

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

**SUBJECT: Discussions with Senator Symington
July - December 1958**

1. This review is based on the documents in the DCI's ICBM notebook, which I have checked against and to some extent supplemented with more detailed notes in my possession.
2. Senator Symington came to the DCI's office alone on 21 July 1958, and was briefed on Soviet long range bombers, ballistic missiles, and nuclear tests. The prepared text used by the DCI for that briefing shows that the Senator was informed that our estimate of the probable Soviet first operational capability date with up to 10 prototype ICBMs was "some time during the year 1959." He was also told, however, that we could not disregard the possibility of a limited Soviet ICBM capability in the latter part of 1958, with missiles of unproven accuracy and reliability. The Senator was also informed of our estimate that "ICBMs could probably be produced, launching facilities completed, and operational units trained at a rate sufficient to give the USSR an operational capability with 100 ICBMs about one year (1960) after its first operational capability date, and with 500 ICBMs about two or at most three years (1961-1962) after first operational capability date."
3. Senator Symington returned with Mr. Lanphier on 6 August 1958. The bulk of the meeting was devoted to Lanphier's exposition about large numbers of long-range firings, his argument that our estimate of a rapid buildup in Soviet ICBM operational strength was inconsistent with our evidence of only a small number of tests, and his concern that in any event the US program was not moving fast enough to catch up with the Soviet. The memorandum for the record written after this conversation shows that at one point Lanphier referred to our estimate of

"100 Soviet ICBMs operational in a year or so and 500 in two years." The DCI made no direct rebuttal to Lanphier's comments in his presence, but after Lanphier had left the room, he re-read to Senator Symington the pertinent portions of the text he had used on 21 July. In response to a point raised by the Senator, the DCI said that if the Soviets achieved a first operational capability in the latter part of 1958, they might have 500 at the end of 1960.

4. The prepared text used by the DCI at his briefing of the CIA Subcommittee of the Senate Armed Services Committee on 8 August 1958 is virtually identical with the text he used to brief Senator Symington on 21 July and 6 August. Senator Symington was present as an invited guest at the 8 August briefing.

5. Senator Symington's letter to the President dated 29 August 1958 summarizes the pertinent portion of the estimate presented by the DCI to the CIA Subcommittee on 8 August as follows (page 2):

"It is estimated the USSR will have an operational quantity of ten of these 5500 mile missiles some time during 1959. They may have this capability some time in 1958.

"From 2 to 3 years after the Soviets acquire these first ten, they will have 500 operational ICBMs."

However, on page 4 of the letter, in a chart intended to summarize the figures given by the DCI, the placing of entries in columns by year shows the USSR having 500 operational ICBMs in 1960 or 1961, depending on whether the first operational capability is 1958 or 1959. A final summary on page 6 says "the CIA estimates the Soviets will have 500 ICBMs by 1960 or 1961."

6. On 10 October 1958, the DCI informed the President by memorandum that the summary of estimates which Senator

Symington included on page 2 of his letter was substantially correct. The memorandum made no direct reference to inconsistencies elsewhere in the Senator's letter, but it repeated (page 5) our estimate that the Soviets could produce and deploy 500 ICBMs "two or at most three years after their initial operational capability date, which we believe will be some time in 1959." It also pointed out (page 2) that "the probable year in which it is estimated the USSR could achieve an operational capability with 500 ICBMs is 1961, or at the latest, 1962." The bulk of this memorandum, however, was devoted to our re-examination of the adequacy of coverage on test firings and of the reasonableness of our estimates in the light of the evidence.

7. On 10 December 1958, Mr. Bryce Harlow, Deputy Assistant to the President, wrote Senator Symington to tell him that a detailed analysis had been made of the information presented in the Senator's letter of 29 August, and that the conclusions reached as a result of this analysis were substantially at variance with the information the Senator had been furnished. Mr. Harlow informed the Senator that the DCI, together with appropriate Defense officials, would give him orally the results of the analysis.

8. Senator Symington returned to the DCI's office on 16 December 1958 at the DCI's invitation. Mr. Lanphier unexpectedly arrived with him, but the DCI said he could not brief representatives of industry, and Mr. Lanphier left the room before detailed discussion began. The prepared text used by the DCI shows that he had elected not to nit-pick the Senator's letter, but to respond to his major criticisms of our intelligence coverage and estimating, to bring him up to date on our latest evidence, and to give him our latest conclusions about the Soviet program. He said we continued to estimate "that the USSR will probably achieve a first operational capability with ten prototype ICBMs at some time during 1959," adding that "while it remains possible that a limited capability with comparatively unproven ICBMs might have been established in 1958, we now believe this to be extremely unlikely." The memorandum for the record written immediately after this conversation shows that the Senator asked

specifically about why the 1958 possibility had been downgraded, and was told that it was largely because of the small number of firings.

9. With respect to future capabilities, the prepared text shows that the DCI read verbatim the pertinent paragraph from the 25 November 1958 estimate, which refers to the probability that a buildup to an operational capability with 500 ICBMs would take three years after first operational capability date, and then says: "Based on our estimate that a first operational capability will probably be achieved some time in 1959, we believe that a capability with 500 ICBMs could be achieved some time in 1962. With overriding priority and exceptional success in their test and development program, this capability might be achieved in as little as two years after first operational capability date, i.e., some time in 1961."

10. The memorandum for the record shows that the Senator checked these and other points against his letter. Although the memorandum states that the Senator was informed that his letter reported the intelligence community's views "essentially correctly," it also states our belief that during the course of the conversation "it was established that the intelligence estimate of when the Soviets could probably achieve an operational capability with 500 ICBMs was 1961 or 1962, rather than as early as 1960."

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